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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000446

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PI AROMANOWSKI, NEA/ARPI DBERNS, R,  
NEA/PPD MQUINN AND CWHITTLESEY, IIP/G/NEA

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KMPI](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE TO IMPROVE BAHRAIN SATELLITE  
TELEVISION AND RADIO

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

1. This is an action paragraph, please see para 6.

2. (SBU) Summary: Bahrain's new Minister of Information and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar, has requested assistance from MEPI to improve Bahrain satellite television and radio. The Ambassador and NEA/PI Director Alina Romanowski met with the Minister March 9 to discuss the range of possible assistance from MEPI. Dr. Abdul Ghaffar requested MEPI funding for a needs assessment for Bahrain television and radio, a strategic plan, and three long term on-site consultants to implement the strategic plan for up to two years.

3. (SBU) The Ambassador, NEA/PI Director Alina Romanowski, and PAO met with Minister of Information and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar Wednesday, March 9, 2005, to discuss the Minister's request for assistance from MEPI for the Bahrain Radio and Television Corporation, which is owned and operated by the GOB. Dr. Abdul Ghaffar, who was appointed Minister of Information in January, 2005, stated that one of his top priorities as Minister of Information is to "reinvent" Bahrain Satellite television and radio from scratch, using U.S. expertise. Referring to widespread public criticism that Bahrain television is out of date and not worth watching, the Minister stated several times that he was under real time pressure to reform Bahrain's broadcast media. He stated, "I have a window of opportunity here and if I don't act fast, we will lose momentum for change." (Comment: A reinvigorated Bahrain satellite channel could potentially win Bahraini viewers back from the more currently viewed Al Manar and Al Jazeera satellite stations. Bahrain Satellite Television can be viewed from Morocco to the Gulf on Arabsat and Nilesat.)

4. (SBU) The Minister requested MEPI support for the following:

A. A needs assessment on the current state of Bahrain TV and radio. The Ministry has already contracted with the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) to rebuild the newsroom's physical and human resources infrastructure, and this project is near completion. The needs assessment requested by the Minister would assess the management of all elements of Bahrain TV and radio including the news, family programming, religious programming, entertainment, public information programs, and talk shows.

B. Development of a detailed strategic plan on how to improve Bahrain TV and radio, including recommendations on restructuring the organization and top and middle management, standardizing human resources management, identifying and implementing staffing objectives, and developing and implementing a plan for meeting current and ongoing training needs.

C. Assistance to identify and fund three long-term consultants: 1) a media expert who would work in tandem with the Director of Bahrain TV and radio as a senior advisor for up to two years; 2) an expert on media/broadcast training who would build from scratch a training office at Bahrain TV/Radio; and 3) an expert on producing and directing original programming for Bahrain TV. The Minister requested that the senior advisor be equipped to oversee all Bahrain TV and radio programming from news programs to talk shows and entertainment.

5. (SBU) NEA/PI Director Romanowski advised the Minister that MEPI would review his request and may be able to assist with the needs assessment phase of the project. She added that a request for proposals might need to be issued to identify an appropriate implementer, and that this process would take some time. Romanowski drew the Minister's attention to the fact that MEPI had already funded several media-related projects in Bahrain including Internews training for print journalists, the University of Bahrain/DePaul University linkage in Mass Communications in 2003, and a MEPI small grant for equipment and training for

the University of Bahrain student radio station. Romanowski also pointed out the importance of building up an indigenous capability to support strong and qualified media experts and ensure that the Ministry of Information integrates these new initiatives in their long term strategic planning.

16. (SBU) Action request for NEA/PI: Post seeks follow-up to the Romanowski visit with the Minister of Information. Please advise the next steps in responding to the Minister's request.

17. This cable has been cleared by Ms. Romanowski.  
Monroe